

restrictive definition -- if I may so -- of outer space weapons which appears in Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's statement of 6 August reinforces us in our view that such work could indeed be useful. This is of special importance because, as I have emphasized on other occasions, the central and essential purpose of any arms control agreement and its related verification system must be to enhance stability, and thus we should close the door on any possible areas of ambiguity or uncertainty. I hope I have succeed in indicating some progress even on outer space over the past four years.

I want now to conclude by addressing, to my mind, the heart of the problem that faces us in arms control, that is to say, the nature of the transaction we would be dealing with. In doing so I will draw upon a recent statement I made in a conference in Ottawa. It is the essence of an arms control and disarmament agreement that the contracting parties agree to renounce, limit or destroy armaments or military forces in return for treaty commitments by other parties to do the same. To ask States to renounce or scrap weapons in return for treaty obligations as an alternative measure of protecting their security is to demand of them a very serious and difficult decision. In effect, a State accepts a treaty in lieu of weapons as a means of protecting its security. This is an extremely important undertaking, since a primary responsibility of any Government must be to protect the security of the country, however defined or perceived. Given the traditional -- and contemporary -- concern with national security, the importance of verification becomes evident: it is the means by which a party ensures confidence, throughout the life of an arms control agreement, that other parties are complying with their obligations while at the same time demonstrating its own good faith. In a world where there are relatively few internationally effective sanctions, verification must inevitably play a critical role in ensuring that a treaty is and remains effective and does not become a source of tension rather than a means of lessening or eliminating it.

There is a very special role that verification must play. Events of recent years have underscored the crucial importance in certain arms control agreements of compliance with their provisions, and, thus, of verification of compliance. It is axiomatic that in an imperfect world, just as there can be no arms control without confidence in compliance, there can be no confidence in compliance without adequate verification. It follows that verification can be seen as the very foundation upon which the whole edifice of arms control agreements rests.

We have seen how even clear-cut and specific verification mechanisms in some multilateral agreements such as the biological and toxin weapons Convention of 1972, which is not merely an arms control agreement but a genuine disarmament agreement, have proven inadequate to dispel suspicions of violations. We have seen in the Gulf War the consequences of the absence of any verification process in the 1925 Geneva Poison Gas Protocol, which is, admittedly, only a non-first-use treaty, but an important one -- of the kind advocated by many for the control of nuclear weapons. We have also seen how evidence derived from the verification mechanisms of some bilateral agreements (such as the ABM Treaty and the threshold test-ban Treaty) can prove ambiguous, and give rise to disputes and suspicion rather than confidence and good faith in dealing with situations suggesting controversial activities.